

Meet Me In the Woods  
bethanyisinjail

## Chapter 17: The Good, the Bad, and the Unspoken

### Notes:

... im so sorry this chapter took forever i've been so busy (i've been doing nothing but playing zelda) i don't know what happened here and why it took like 80 years but it's here!!! i'll try to be a little less infrequent but this chapter is long to make up for how long it took

thank you for being patient!!!!  
(See the end of the chapter for more notes.)

### Chapter Text

"And so that kind of feeds into the cycle of how magic is taken and given because the wood produces its own magic and doesn't just take it from the Isles," Hunter rambles on to Willow, who has very graciously agreed to let him talk at her about the history of Alder trees that he was talking to Raine about the other day. When he couldn't sleep last night he went and dug up some books about it to relax, and Eda has a surprising number of them. So now, filled with so much new knowledge, he needed someone to tell about it, especially after the morning they had. Willow, after she brought him up here and helped him calm down from the Eda fiasco, said she'd be more than willing to listen to it. He stops and looks over, though, when he feels something fall against his shoulder, smiling when he sees Willow asleep on top of his shoulder. He must not have realized she was falling asleep, although he definitely doesn't mind. She looks calm, actually relaxed compared to how exhausted she's looked recently. He doesn't want to wake her up, so instead, he stays quiet and just watches. A part of him starts panicking that maybe he bored her, but he realizes pretty quickly that it definitely wasn't that. She hasn't been sleeping well at all, and he's just really happy she felt safe enough with him to let her guard down enough and rest. It feels great to mean that much to her.

He doesn't get to watch for long, though, before she starts to shift uncomfortably, her face twisting into fear. He loses all thought on what to do, just watching as she stirs a bit before shooting straight up, heavy breathing and looking around panicked.

"Hey, Willow, it's ok," He jumps to assure her, Willow looking back at him with her eyes wide, "Hey, it's ok, everything is ok."

She lets out a big sigh of relief, tears welling up in her eyes as she whispers, "I'm sorry."

"Why? Why are you sorry?" He puzzles, Willow moving back to sit up next to him the way she was before she fell asleep. She shakes her head, moving her glasses to be up on top of her head, rubbing her eyes and quietly telling him.

"Sorry, I fell asleep, you were talking," She apologizes, although Hunter can tell that's not everything.

"It's alright, I really don't mind," Hunter assures her, "You're welcome to nap if you need."

"No, no, it's fine," She shakes her head, tears running down her cheeks. She wipes them away fast, brokenly apologizing, "Sorry, sorry, I'm sorry."

"Are you ok?" He asks, finally spotting his opportunity to ask her about how she's been that Gus asked for yesterday. "Is something bothering you? We can talk about it if you want, I'm here to listen."

"It's ok, no, you can keep talking," She tells him, her voice clearly cusp on crying, "I'm ok."

"Hey, I know you're not ok," He tells her, Willow looking over almost surprised, "I know you haven't been ok, but I don't want to push you." She shrugs, looking back into her lap and not saying anything. Hunter tries to think about what helps him when he feels really bad, deciding to try and focus on one thing at a time. "Do you want to start with talking about what woke you up?"

"Just a nightmare," She tells him, shrugging, "I get them a lot."

"About what?" He puzzles, Willow looking at him for a long moment silently. He tries to read her expression but he can't, and luckily she speaks after a moment.

"You," She admits to him, Hunter feeling a bit of embarrassed blush spread across his cheeks. He ignores it, though, listening as she continues, "I watched you die, I held you and you weren't breathing and I didn't even realize it until you sat up and were coughing that you died when Belos was in you, Hunter. You drowned, and in every nightmare I have I can't save you or I can't save Gus or I can't save Luz and Amity or Camila or my dads. I have them about everyone but most of all I have them about you. And- And then it got a little better and then you couldn't breathe in the middle of the night and I went from getting a little sleep to getting nothing. What if I hadn't been up when you couldn't breathe? What if I had reacted better? Could I have done better and helped you more and- I just think about this stuff all the time. I don't know, I don't know what's wrong with me."

"Nothing is wrong with you," He assures her, "Something bad happened, of course, you're struggling with it."

"But it's not even that bad," She shakes her head, a sob escaping her throat, "You're going through so much and so is Luz and Gus and Amity and I can just figure it out. I don't need help, I can just- I can handle it."

"It's ok not to be able to handle it," Hunter presses, "I- I care a lot about you and I don't want you to struggle alone. I'm here to listen, please, let me listen, Willow."

Willow stares at him for a minute, pressing her lips together as her face twists into the telltale expression that she's about to cry. Brokenly, she chokes out, "I'm so tired, Hunter."

Hunter draws her into a hug, letting her break down against his shoulder, loudly crying against him. He rubs her back just like people have done to him, although he decides to

keep quiet. He's not sure what she needs right now, and he just wants to help her however he can. She starts crying so hard she sounds like she can't breathe, Hunter putting his hands on her shoulders and pulling her back so he can look at her. Her expression has shifted from just upset to panicked, Hunter holding his hand out for her.

"It's ok, breathe with me, ok?" He tells her, Willow nodding and breathing in with Hunter as he counts up. They repeat the breathing ritual over and over again as she relaxes, Hunter smiling at her when she looks up at him. It takes her a couple of minutes but she catches her breath, shaking her head and hiccuping.

"I'm just so tired and I can't relax and I need to be there and be reliable for everyone but it's just so tiring and I just miss my dads," She cries, "I don't even know if they're ok or where they are and every time that I'm up late at night I just want my dads to hold me and tell me it's gonna be ok and they can't and I know they can't but I still can't sleep ."

Hunter nods for a second, contemplating the offer before tentatively telling her, "I know that I'm not your dads but, you're welcome to come here. I can do all of those things, and I can assure you if you have a nightmare or anything that I'm still alive, too, if you need it. I-I just want you to be ok, and you need to sleep. I know it's hard sometimes, I get it. But you can sleep in here with me if you need... too." The moment the words leave his mouth he regrets it, knowing he overstepped and immediately blushing, "I-I'm sorry I didn't mean to say that-

"No, no, it's ok," Willow assures him, wiping her eyes, "I-I would like that, if uh- if you're ok with it. I just- I haven't slept and I'm exhausted and I fell right asleep hearing you talk because I-I knew you were alive ."

"Yeah, ok, yeah. We can uh, lay down," Hunter nods, Willow smiling at him and wiping her face again, taking her glasses off of her head and handing them to him to put on the makeshift nightstand next to his bed made out of one of Eda's boxes. When Hunter looks back, Willow is already laying down fully. Hunter follows her lead, Flapjack hopping from Hunter's lap onto his chest as he does. Willow lays beside him, the two of them not touching the best they can in Hunter's small bed. She looks over at him, Hunter swearing she's blushing but convincing himself that he's seeing things. She doesn't close her eyes, though, so Hunter awkwardly offers, "I can uh, talk to you, if it'll help."

"No, no, it's ok," She assures him, "Just- Thank you for wanting to help."

"Yeah, always, of course," Hunter nods. She lays her head so she's looking up at the ceiling in silence, closing her eyes a couple of times only for them to spring back open. Hunter tries to think of a good way to help her. He can talk, but he knows he can't do it forever. He puzzles it out, if she worries he's dead, she needs a reminder that he's alive. He says it way too suddenly, blurting out, "You can lay on my chest if you want."

She looks over at him in surprise, Hunter scrambling to explain what he just said.

"I mean like- like to listen to my- my heart, you know beat. I mean, at least I think it beats, I've never listened to it before and it's not real so maybe it doesn't do that but I mean if you want to but if you don't I get it I kinda blurted it-"

"Hunter," She chuckles, smiling at him fondly, "It's ok, I-I would like that."

Hunter nods, shocked she actually said yes, "Yeah, ok, yeah, Flapjack come here."

Hunter puts Flapjack in his hand, holding his left arm up to let Willow move over, Willow awkwardly laying her head down on top of him. Her hair is tied into two braids, so it doesn't brush against Hunter's face at all. She very carefully lays her head where his heart is, or where he assumes it is. He flushes even deeper when she laughs, realizing she can feel how fast it's going. She lifts her head up and smiles at him, surprisingly not commenting on that.

"Your heart makes a weird sound," She comments, "Like energy humming. Mmm mmm mmm, like that."

Hunter looks at her confused, "It doesn't beat?"

"No, it like pulses," She says, a noticeable blush spreading across the tops of her cheeks as she tells him, "I like it, it's calming."

"Uh, yeah, yeah ok, good," He flusteredly replies, Willow laying her head back down. He watches her back as her breathing evens out very fast, Hunter is sure she's fallen asleep. She was out like a light, Hunter realizing that she was probably barely keeping her eyes open. He feels really bad that she's been having such a hard time, but he knows that she's not going to be ready to really talk about it until she's slept a little bit. He feels so weird knowing that this is helping her, but it's not strange in a bad way. Strange in a really good way, it's so bizarre knowing that he really means this much to her. He doesn't want to keep her up at night, not at all, so hopefully, he can help her feel at ease at least a little bit. Of course, someone else has a comment on this situation too, Hunter hearing Flapjack twitter in his hand laying on the bed.

"Hunter red," Flapjack hops up his arm so he's standing on top of his right shoulder instead of in his right hand by his side, "Hunter help pretty girl!"

Hunter grits his teeth at Flapjack but he doesn't say anything, just shaking his head. Flapjack just tweets again.

"Hunter and pretty girl adorable," He teasingly twitters at him, Hunter's ears twitching and Hunter shaking his head. Flapjack does this just to embarrass him, just because he knows Hunter will get all flustered and his face will turn bright red and his ears will twitch and he'll start thinking about how much he so deeply cares about Willow. He likes her, he's accepted that, but he doesn't know what that even entails. He's embarrassed to ask, too, because how does he start that conversation? He wouldn't even know who to ask, either. He could ask Luz but she would just tease him and tell him that he just has to know what he wants, he could ask Eda but he's heard about how her relationships have been short and shallow, he could ask Raine but... maybe he'll have to ask Raine.

He lays there quietly contemplating what he's going to do with this weird attachment he's gotten to Willow for a while. He's not sure how long goes by but he jumps a bit when the door opens, worried initially that Willow is going to wake up. She's dead asleep, though, so she barely even moves. He looks up at the doorway to see Luz standing there agape, Hunter repressing the urge to groan. Luz points between them and makes a weird motion with her hands, pushing the tips of her fingers on each hand together and then pushing her hands together. Hunter squints at her confused, Luz holding up a heart with her hand to them. He shakes his head, mouthing at her and pointing, "No! Get out!"

Luz quietly chuckles and points at her ears, Hunter realizing his are twitching rapidly. He shakes his head again, looking back up to see Luz holding out her arm and pointing at it, Hunter looking at his left arm that's currently out directly to the side of him. Luz lowers her arm and points at him, clearly telling him to lower his arm onto Willow. That feels weird, though, so he shakes his head.

"Come on!" She mouths, "Hold her!"

"No!" He mouths back, shaking his head again. He's trying to shake the blush off his face so maybe he won't get teased that badly, but it's already a lost cause. Luz just silently chuckles and shakes her head, walking into the room and up to Flapjack, who starts wordlessly tweeting at her from where he's perched on Hunter. She points at him and looks at Hunter questioningly, Hunter nodding to give her permission to take him. She holds her hands out and lets Flapjack hop into them, whispering to him as they walk out.

"He is not smooth at all, is he, Flap?" She jokes with him, Hunter rolling his eyes as Luz walks out of the room, shutting the door quietly behind herself. Hunter lays his head back on the pillow and sighs, staring up at the ceiling and knowing Luz is going to tease him for an hour later. She did make him think, though, and he looks down at his arm awkwardly out to the side and hesitantly decides to lay it over top of Willow, setting it down so carefully that she doesn't even stir at first. She moves a bit, and although he panics for a moment he's very surprised when she grabs his hand and pulls his arm closer, Hunter excitedly smiling and blushing. He feels so good to know he's helping. She's been so clearly drained recently and Hunter feels really special to be able to be the person to help her out. It feels nice, and he knows he's been told multiple times not to base his self-worth on how much he can help, Camila made sure to tell him that plenty of times after he spent hours helping around the house. This is different, though, this is someone he cares about and someone he wants to show that he cares about.

She lays there completely asleep for a very long time, Hunter completely content with just laying there on his own and looking up at the ceiling. He doesn't plan on falling asleep, but the weight on top of him is very relaxing. So, what if he does drift off a bit? He doesn't know if he and Willow will get to lay like this again, so he's going to suck it up while it lasts.

Because he really, really, likes this feeling. Whatever it is.

\*\*\*

Gus hugs his knees to his chest, leaning his head against the wall of the closet he's curled up in the corner in. Willow and Hunter went off a little while ago after Eda got back and they put all the groceries away, and as much as Gus told them he was ok and wanted some time alone, he really didn't. He doesn't blame them, they tried to stay with him, but Gus wants Hunter to get the opportunity to talk to Willow a bit. The only way that's going to happen is if he gets her alone, and that won't happen as long as Gus expresses interest at all in wanting them around. He really appreciates the two of them caring about him, but he also wants them to realize they can be with just each other sometimes, too.

He looks out the open door to the closet when he hears Luz walk by, talking to who he assumes is Flapjack. She doesn't come in, though, going back into her room where she and Amity retreated after Luz finished helping her mom put stuff away. The two of them were talking in furious Spanish while they were doing it, and Gus couldn't even try to keep up. Luz poked her head in here before she went into Eda's room where Willow and Hunter are, but Gus just told her he wanted to be alone too. She didn't press too hard, but she also looks almost sickly, so Gus is sure she didn't have it in her to do that. It made his chest clench uncomfortably too, seeing Luz this bad. She has her good days, but this certainly isn't one of them. Of course, this isn't a good day for Gus either, so he can't blame her.

He rests his head on his knees, staring absently at all of the human stuff piled in this closet he's holed up in, having no passion to go and toy with any of it to pass the time. He doesn't know what it is or why he feels like this, but he just feels sad and lonely to the point where he can't even do anything to fix it. It's somehow deafeningly quiet, too, Gus only looking up when he hears one door open in the hallway, a knock, and another door opening and closing. He doesn't think a lot of it until a couple of minutes later the door opens and closes again, this time Gus hearing footsteps come closer to him. He looks up when someone moves into the doorway of the closet, seeing Camila looking in at him, smiling.

"What are you doing in here?" She asks, "Can I come sit?"

"Mhm, yeah," He nods, Camila coming in and sitting down next to him against the wall, next to him but not touching.

"How are you, cariño? You look a bit lonely in here on your own," She comments, Gus shrugging.

"I'm ok," He tries to assure her, looking up to see her looking at him knowingly, Gus sighing and continuing, "I don't know, I'm just worried."

"Worried about what?" She calmly asks, "Anything in particular?"

"No, I mean, not really," He pulls his legs a bit closer, wrapping his arms around them, "I'm just worried about my friends, they- they're all off without me, and I mean, I know why. I kind of told them all I wanted to be alone and I know they would never try to exclude me but I'm

worried about them breaking off and going to do their own thing. I-I like the way things were, I don't want that to change."

"I know they would never leave you behind, that's just not the kind of people your friends are," She assures him.

"I know, I know that and that's the hard part," He answers, "I know they do everything in their power to include me all the time but I also want them to be able to be with one another. I mean, Luz and Amity are dating and Hunter and Willow should be, I'm just, I don't know, here in the middle."

"Mhm, yeah, I see," She nods, "It's a lot harder because you really want them to be able to be together but you also really want them to be with you. You don't have anywhere else to go right now, either, so it gets a little stifling in here, right?"

Gus nods, "Mhm, yeah."

"But it won't always be like this. We'll get out of here soon and everything will start moving back towards more normal, and if your friends want to go out you'll find something else to do that's not just in this house. I know it's not going to help anything now, but looking forward to something is important to help pull you through something difficult like this," She explains, "What have you done before when your friends are off with one another?"

"Well, before we got to the Human Realm things weren't like this with us at all. It was just Luz, Amity, Willow, and I, and even that was recent. Before it was just Luz and Willow and I, and back before that it was just Willow and I, so I've never really had a hard time fitting in like this. I don't know, I don't want to say anything mean because they're really not trying to do it, I'm actually trying to get Willow and Hunter to just hang out with the two of them because they always want to hang out with me. Which- which I like a lot, I mean, Willow is my best friend and I love hanging out with Hunter, but the two of them clearly like each other and I just want them to spend some time with just the two of them. I think it'll be good for Willow, too, I think she's been having a real hard time being here."

"And that's very nice of you to think about them like that, and I'm sure that they see that too," She affirms, "But I'm sorry it makes things so hard for you, though. You shouldn't need to be in here alone, that isn't fair and it's ok to be upset about it."

"Mhm," He hums, letting silence sit between them a second before telling her, "I have another friend, too. I miss him."

"What's his name?" She asks.

"Mattholomule," Gus answers, smiling, "I hate him a lot but he's one of my best friends. I don't know where he is, probably out there annoying someone with his stupid face."

She laughs, "Does he like human stuff, too?"

"Yeah, that's how we met, actually. He was trying to take over the Human Appreciation Society from me- well, he succeeded, but I ended up saving him from the man-eating detention pit," He explains, Camila looking at him mildly shocked, Gus figuring she's surprised he was able to do that. "Yeah, Luz and I escaped it, pretty impressive, right?"

"Yeah, yeah," She replies, shaking her head, "Anyway, you'll have to tell him about all of the stuff you did in the Human Realm, then. He'll be jealous."

"He's gonna be so jealous," Gus agrees, "I've ridden in a real human car, eaten real human food, and lived with a real human. He's gonna be so jealous."

"And a real human ear piercing," She points at his ear, where the magic amplifier is hanging. Gus smiles.

"From you, a real human!" He adds, Camila laughing.

"Well, it was almost from your friends, I'd rather me than them," She says, Gus returning a laugh. The silence lingers for longer than before, the optimistic feeling talking about seeing Mathtolomule again wearing off, a familiar weight settling in its place. He frustratedly sighs, Camila looking over at him.

"What's up? Is there something else bothering you?"

Gus sighs again, "I don't know, I just- I don't feel- feel good."

"Like sick or just not good?" She asks, worried.

"Not sick, no," He shakes his head, "Just- heavy, I guess."

"There's a lot going on, it makes sense to feel like it's weighing down on you," She reasons, Gus nodding, blinking away tears that spring up out of nowhere. He shrugs.

"I- I mean, yeah everything is just a lot, it's overwhelming, but it's always felt like that for me, I guess. But I was talking about this to Willow the other day and we agreed that no one ever seems to want to talk about anything happening and then the thing that happened with Eda is just like- not even the adults are talking about anything and I'm sick of just pretending everything is ok and it's not , it's not and I just don't understand. I should , but I'm just not- not getting it or seeing whatever it is that's keeping everyone else afloat but it's not working for me and I'm just- I just don't want to dance around it anymore because I don't get it."

Gus feels a lump form in his throat at his ramble, trying his best not to tear up. He doesn't want to bother Camila with that, he did enough of that in the Human Realm, and as much as he tries to use this history to keep himself calm, thinking of how comforting she is just makes him start crying. She opens her arms right up to him, Gus moving over and letting her hug him tight, whispering to him, "It's ok, baby, I know it's hard but you're doing a very good job at managing everything, and even if everyone else seems like they're doing just fine I guarantee you they're not. I've told you before, I am always so proud of you and how mature you've been through all of this. It's ok to have these moments, and it's ok to come and ask



for help and to talk about these things going on that don't make sense, and remember I'll always be here for you. Even if no one else wants to talk about this stuff, I always will. We can talk about it forever if it helps you, ok?"

He nods, although feeling her warmth and comfort just makes him long for his dad. Camila is awesome, she's so nice and caring, but she isn't Gus' dad. Her hugs will never feel like his, her words will never sound like his, and when Gus finally sits back after a minute, she doesn't look like him, either. Gus chokes on a sob, falling back into Camila's embrace and brokenly telling her, "I miss my dad."

"Oh, niño, it's ok," She rubs the back of his head, "He's going to be alright, ok? If he's like you he's going to be just fine," She assures him, Gus shaking his head.

"He's alone," He tearfully tells her, "He's out there alone. And- and I'm upset about being alone but he's probably been alone for a long time and what if he's not ok?"

"I'm sure he's just fine, and we're going to find him and fix all of this," She tells him, Gus sitting back and looking up at her. "Do you want to talk about him? We can talk about whatever you'd like, I won't shy away from anything."

Gus nods, leaning back against the wall and looking out in front of him for a minute, wiping his eyes and telling her, "I'm just really worried about him."

"Mhm, of course, you don't know where he is or if he's ok, it makes a lot of sense," She nods.

"But I'm just worried about how he's doing too. I mean, Eda said that the Collector has been playing with people like they're dolls, but my dad doesn't have anybody out there with him. It's just me and him, it's just been me and him for a very long time," Gus tells her, "Since I was a baby, I don't even remember my mom at all."

"Do you want to talk about what happened to her?" She asks, Gus shrugging.

"She just left, I'm not really that bothered by it," Gus replies, "I never knew her, but I know she lied to my dad about some stuff. I don't even have any pictures of her, I have no idea what she looks like or anything. My dad just raised me on his own, he had no family or anything either."

Camila nods, "That's very hard, I know, I did it with Luz. Being a single parent without any family you can readily see is so difficult, your dad is very strong. And, as someone who was separated from Luz for a while, I know how hard he's going to fight to keep going for you. He's thinking about seeing you again just as much as you're thinking about him. It's helping him get through everything, remembering he'll see you again, and I know it's hard but it can help you too."

"How?" Gus asks, "Every time I think about him I just get really sad."

"It's going to be a little sad, but if you think about that you're going to see him again soon, you can think about it positively," She warmly smiles at him, asking, "Like, when you see him again, what are you going to do?"

"Uh, hug him. probably," He answers, wetly chuckling before saying, "Probably cry, too."

She chuckles too, "What are you going to tell him about first? I mean, you went to the Human Realm, if he's anything like you he's going to want to hear all about it."

"Yeah, he would," He nods, "We used to talk about taking a stupid vacation to the Human Realm when I was sad as a kid. He always heard about things that washed up on our shores, human stuff specifically, and he always thought the Human Realm was cool so he taught me all about it. I'm sad I didn't get to go with him when I went."

"But you can still tell him all about it," She proposes, Gus nodding.

"I just want to tell him now," He sadly replies, resting his head on top of his knees, "I don't want to have to wait, I just- I know how I want to say things and how I'd tell the story but it's so hopeless just waiting forever."

"So why don't you write it down?" She proposes, "Make little journal entries about what you want to tell him and add to it if something happens. Good or bad, maybe you can write about something cool you did or how hard something was or how much you miss him, but keep it all in one place."

"I- Yeah, that's a good idea, but uh, I don't have a journal," Gus tells her, knowing how stupid the complaint is but every little thing keeping him from feeling better feels like a huge obstacle to him right now. He's not sure why he's so sensitive, but Camila makes him feel very comfortable to just act like that sometimes, and true to her nature, she just smiles at him.

"Well, we have a ton of things in here, there has to be something like a journal, want to look?" She offers, Gus giving her a small smile and nodding.

"Yeah, we can look," He affirms, getting up and walking over to the boxes on the wall opposite from him, "A lot of these have books and stuff in them, maybe they'll have a journal."

"Maybe, let's look," She gets up too, beginning to rifle through one of the boxes. Gus cards through book after book looking for something that looks like a journal. He picks up a couple of things that look promising, but they just turn out to be old books Gus doesn't care to look at. If he cracks it open and there's text inside, he puts it back. He looks up from his search when Camila speaks, "Ooo, Gus, here, look," She holds out a journal to him, Gus taking it and excitedly gasping when he sees the cover. It's the art of the crew from the first Cosmic Frontier book on the front, Gus looking up at her.

"How did you find this?" He asks, flipping through the pages to see that there are really lines inside for a journal, Camila chuckling.

"Because I wrote in the same one when I was your age. Well, a little older, but still," She tells him, Gus looking up at her confused.

"You like Cosmic Frontier?" He questions, Camila nodding.

"Of course, why do you think all of that stuff is in my basement?" She smiles at him, "I loved all of this back in the day, it's what brought Luz's dad and me together, actually. A lot of that stuff is his, I was happy to see you boys get some use out of it."

"Is that why the boxes were labeled?" Gus realizes, "I'm sorry, I didn't know."

"No, no, don't apologize, Manny would have loved to see our stuff get used again," She assures him, "Don't worry about it, if I was uncomfortable I would've asked you to stop. But I think that's the perfect journal for you to write to your dad in, you can explain to him all about the series while you're at it, too."

"Oh, yeah, maybe," He nods, looking back down at the back cover, which is a continuation of the scene on the front. He smiles, looking back up at her, "Thank you for finding this."

"Of course, cariño! I'm glad I could help," She rubs his shoulder, "What are you going to write first?"

"Hm, I don't know, maybe I should start at the beginning," He says, realizing that she's probably going to leave soon. He doesn't want that, he's really enjoying her company but he feels stupid asking her to just sit with him as he writes. Instead, he jumps to ask her for something that will keep her around, "I, uh, I don't remember a lot of it, though, can you uh, help? With just like- names and things, of foods and stuff."

She chuckles, "I'd love to help you out, is there a pencil around here somewhere?"

"Oh, yeah, in here," Gus reaches into a little box to his left, pulling out a pen from the box full of them. He opens up to the first page and scribbles in the top corner, a little bit of ink coming out onto the page after a couple of scribbles. He walks over and sits down back against the wall, Camila walking up next to him and sitting down. Gus twiddles the pen between his fingers, looking up at Camila and asking, "Where should I start?"

"Well, you can start with the band-aids I gave you, those are human, right?" She questions, Gus nodding and starting to write down the beginning of the story. Camila continues to retell their first day in her house to him, Gus realizing how much of it he was asleep for. He writes everything down, though, smiling as he thinks about how much his dad is going to love all of this stuff, and how excited he is to be able to write down all of this stuff. He uses all of the flowery journalism language that his dad has used with him his whole life. It feels really therapeutic, and he's so comforted having Camila help him write things down. He smiles when she praises his ability to write, and she listens when that comment sends him onto a tangent about how his dad is a reporter and a journalist and he loves that stuff. It's not a show like he feels like he's putting on with his friends sometimes. It's natural, and it brings him back to himself a bit.

And he's looking forward to showing Hunter his cool new journal, too.

\*\*\*

Eda bounces her leg up and down as she mulls over the previous recipes that Lilith has been trying for their elixir, trying to understand which ingredient keeps messing up her brews. She's close, she has to be, she has all of the ingredients that go into calming potions and mindscape healing potions and curse tempering potions. But something is having an adverse reaction and causing the potion to mutate and Eda can't put her finger on it. It's hard, and she's realizing why Lilith has been spending all of her time up here in her room. She's spent hours on this and she's no closer than she was a couple of hours ago.

Her head snaps up when someone knocks on the door, Eda looking at Lilith confused. She must wait too long because they knock again, Raine calling into the room, "Edalyn if you don't plate dinner and get the kids down there I'm going to be so mad at you."

"Huh?" She puzzles, getting up and opening the door, seeing Raine standing on the other side. They have their arms crossed, and as angry as they look they also look really overstimulated.

"I made dinner, go plate it," They firmly demand, "Please."

"I- I would've helped you, what- what time is it?" She looks back at Lilith, who looks down at her watch and tells her.

"Six fifteen," She answers, Eda looking back at Raine surprised.

"I'm sorry, shoot, I didn't realize it was that late. I would've come to help," She apologizes, "I'm sorry."

Raine's expression softens ever so slightly, "It's- It's fine, just plate it and get the kids."

"Yeah, yeah, of course," She nods, Raine not saying anything and just walking away, Eda watching them go back into their room. She sighs, looking back at Lilith and asking, "Did you know what time it is?"

"Yeah, but I wanted to see if you really cared enough to watch the clock," She replies, not looking at Eda.

Eda groans, "Are you kidding me, Lily? Now Raine is furious at me because they think I made them make dinner on their own."

"You did."

"No, I didn't, because I didn't know what time it was," She justifies, "If someone told me I would've done it."

"Well, you shouldn't need to be told," Lilith reasons, looking back at her, "You've never had to be told before."

"But normally I- Whatever," She shakes her head, "I'll be back with food."

"Mhm," Lilith just hums, Eda shutting the door behind herself and standing in front of Luz's door, preparing herself for how she hasn't seen any of the kids all day today. She just puts it aside, though, knocking on the door. It opens a second later, Amity standing on the other side. Before either of them can say anything, Eda just tells them.

"Dinner is ready, come on, come downstairs," She says, Amity nodding and looking back at Luz sitting on the bed, walking back to her. Eda just moves to the next door, knocking on Gus and Willow's door next. No one answers, Eda looking back when a voice behind her calls.

"We're in here," Gus says, Eda walking back to the closet of human things, poking her head inside and seeing Gus sitting in the corner, writing in some kind of journal. Camila is sitting next to him, surprisingly, a book in her lap. Across from the two of them are Hunter and Willow, both looking at a book on the ground in front of the two of them. They all look up at Eda when she comes in, Eda giving them a shallow smile, aware of how Camila yelled at her earlier and not really sure where they're standing right now.

"Dinner is ready downstairs, come on," She tells them, looking at Camila, "You don't have to, obviously."

She chuckles, Eda relieved to hear that she's not mad, at least not overtly. "I'll come, you don't have to ask me twice."

Eda returns the laugh, heading downstairs and into the kitchen. It smells really good, fried green plant meat with brown mandrakes and ceyerrots, and another pot with speckled gravy in it. All things Luz and Camila can eat, too, with the exception of the gravy, Eda smiling at how Raine knew exactly what they could and couldn't make. They also were nice enough to set the table with silverware for all of the kids, taking a bit of a weight off of Eda's shoulders. She starts to make plates for all of the kids, although she's not even finished with the first plate when the first two kids come down.

Luz and Amity walk in first, hand in hand, Eda telling them, "I'll bring over plates in a second."

"Mhm," Amity hums, the two of them sitting down at the table. Gus, Willow, Hunter, and Camila come down right after, Eda repeating the same thing to them.

"You can sit, I'll bring over the plates in a second," She says as she brings Luz's plate to the table and sets it in front of her, Luz not saying anything. Although, her mom is in the room, so that doesn't last very long.

"Mija," Camila chides, Luz looking back at Eda.

"Thank you," She says to Eda, Eda smiling at her as she goes to plate food for Amity, the other three kids sitting down where they normally sit. Camila comes up next to Eda.

"Do you want some help?" She offers, "I feel bad letting you do this by yourself."

"No, no, it's ok," She assures her, "I got it."

"Are you sure?" She presses, although not aggressively.

"Mhm, yeah," Eda nods, smiling, "You can just take your plate, though, if you want."

"Mhm," Camila nods, grabbing a plate out of the cabinet and filling up her plate, thanking Eda before going out of the room. Eda gives Amity her plate, Amity thanking her, and Eda starting on Gus'. The kids don't talk at all, and when Eda drops off Gus' plate and realizes this is her opportunity to apologize to them. She works herself up to it as she makes Willow's plate, and when she drops it off she starts talking.

"I'm sorry for scaring you guys today, the Owl Beast got the better of me," She apologizes, looking at Willow as she puts the plate in front of her, "But, I forgot to tell you last time too, I've seen your dads both times I've gone into town. They're both just fine, the Collector has them walking around together."

"Really!?" She asks, her face lighting up, "You saw them?"

"Mhm, I did, they're just fine," She assures her, Willow beaming at her.

"Thank you," She replies, Gus and Amity looking back at Eda.

"Did you see my Dad?" Gus asks.

"Or Ed and Em?" Amity questions, Eda looking between both of them and shaking her head.

"No, I'm sorry, kids, I didn't see them," She apologizes, Amity nodding and looking back forward, but Gus looks at her completely broken. Eda tries to assure him, "It'll be ok, he's out there. I didn't look, maybe next time I'll see him. I'm sure he's just fine, though, so far I haven't seen anyone in the spell in the last month that has been anything less than ok." Gus nods, looking back forward and shrinking down a bit, killing the enthusiastic mood at the table. Eda cuts her losses and walks back to the stove to make Hunter's plate, handing it to him when she's done. She points back towards the stove, telling all of the kids, "If you want any more just grab it, ok?"

They all hum and nod, Eda going back over to the stove and sighing when she realizes that she has no way to hold two plates to bring one to Lilith. She decides to make Lilith's plate first, putting a fork and a knife on her plate and bringing it upstairs to Lilith's door. She has no other hand to open it, though, instead hitting it with her stump. Lilith comes to answer the door a second later, smiling at her.

"Ooo, thank you," She takes the plate from Eda, "No spoon?"

"You were lucky I got it up here," She quips back, taking a couple of steps back, "I still need to grab mine, I'll be right back."

"Get me a spoon!" Lilith tells her, Eda groaning as she walks away.

"Fine!" Eda calls as she heads back down the hallway and down the stairs, going back into the kitchen to make her plate. The kids are all talking to one another but quietly, Eda not even looking at them to try not to make them stop. She's starting to feel really bad about going out today without telling anyone, because maybe if she was more attentive she could've seen Perry or Ed or Em. But she didn't and there's nothing she can do about it, so she's trying to just learn from it and let it roll off her back. She plates her food quickly, taking a decent amount because she's been feeling the Owl Beast demanding more food all day, despite the several snacks she's had as she's worked. She grabs a spoon for Lilith too, balancing three pieces of silverware on her plate as she walks back upstairs and into Lilith's room. The door is still open, so she's able to walk right in and set her plate down on the table that she was sitting at. She hands Lilith the spoon, Lilith grabbing it from where she's sitting at the table.

"Thank you," Lilith replies, the two of them eating in complete silence. Eda scarfs her food down fast, almost surprised when the food is all gone. She just shrugs it off, knowing the Owl Beast gets in its moods and she knows fighting will just make things worse. She goes back to working on the elixir recipe, waiting for Lilith to finish up her food so she can go wash the dishes. Eda isn't really getting any work done, though, the moment that the Owl Beast is satisfied with its dinner it curls up quietly in the corner of her mindscape, leaving her thoughts to swirl around on their own. They center too much around Raine, Raine's expression when telling her to plate dinner, how tense they looked, how they gazed at her with no care in their eyes. She's not sure if it's a product of her own mind, their overstimulation, or that they're just sick of her. It's not a nice thought, and it keeps her from focusing on what she's trying to do.

Lilith eats for so long , but when she finally does she lets Eda know by turning back and holding out her plate, "Here."

"What?" Eda looks up from where she's lost in thought. She takes Lilith's plate, looking at it confused.

"You're cleaning the dishes, right?" Lilith assumes, "There, there's my dish."

"Are you kicking me out?" Eda questions, Lilith shrugging.

"No, I'm just reminding you of what you should be doing, you know, something you apparently need," She clips back, Eda sighing.

"I've been in here too long for you, you're getting snippy," Eda shakes her head, stacking Lilith's plate on hers and putting all of the silverware on the top plate, picking it up. Her hand aches a bit under the repeated strain it's been going through holding plates like this. She just ignores it, though, really not wanting to admit the defeat that she's hurting her only hand right now. She walks up to the door and realizes that she has no way to open it, looking back at Lilith. "If you want me out so badly, open the door."

Lilith groans but gets up from where she's sitting and opens up her bedroom door, letting Eda walk out into the hallway. Lilith shuts it behind her, Eda just walking down the hallway and down the stairs. The kids are already gone, and all of their plates are in the sink. Eda puts hers and Lilith's in the sink too, stepping back a second and looking at the pile of dishes, trying to work out how she's going to clean them. She has one hand, so she can only either hold the sponge or the plate. If she can set it up so she only has to hold the sponge to clean the plate, she could clean dishes just fine. There's no good way she can think of to do that, deciding to call for advice and whistling for Owlbert to come. He flies in from wherever in the house he was probably destroying something, Eda going to ask him for his advice but stopping when he sees he's covered in dust. "Owlbert, what were you doing?"

"For Eda, secret," Owlbert tells her, sitting down on top of the pile of dishes, Eda waving him away.

"Owlbert, you're gross!" She tells him, chuckling, "You're sitting on plates we eat off of."

"No wet!" He argues.

"No water, fine, just let me clean you off with a towel or something," She reasons, grabbing an uncharmed cleaning rag out of the cabinet below her and tapping the counter in front of her, Owlbert sitting down on it. She cleans off the dust, Owlbert happily hooting at him as she rubs him on the head. "You are a menace, you know that?"

He just gleefully hoots at her, Eda putting aside the rag and scratching his head.

"I don't know how I'm going to do this, I mean, should I just cave and ask for help?" She questions, sighing, "I feel like I should be able to do it on my own, ugh, I definitely need to do it on my own."

"Eda can get help," Owlbert tells her, "Eda can do, or people can help. Raine?"

"No, no, you missed that, haven't you?" Eda gives him a tight smile, "Raine and I have some things to work through."

"Ok?" Owlbert questions.

"I hope so," Eda sighs, "Whatever, though, they can't help."



“Luz!” Owlbert happily hops, “Luz help!”

“But I always ask Luz for help,” Eda replies, “I don’t want to use her like that.”

“Owlbert goes,” Owlbert flies away before Eda can even stop him, looking out the doorway into the hallway where he soared out. She knows she can’t stop him now, and she wanted to chat with Luz at some point soon anyway. It’s so hard to catch Luz now, she avoids Eda like she’s poison, and Eda has been having a really hard time convincing herself that it’s not Eda’s fault. When Luz left the Isles she was curling up in the same bed as Eda and came back barely able to look her in the eye. What changed?

Eda gets drawn out of her train of thought when she hears footsteps down the hallway, looking up to see Luz walking in, Owlbert perched on her shoulder. “Hey,” Luz greets, “Owlbert came and got me, are you ok?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Eda nods, pausing a second before deciding to just admit it, “I’m ok, I’m just puzzling out how I’m going to wash dishes.”

“Do you want some help?” Luz offers, “I mean, I’m not doing anything, I’ll help.”

Eda contemplates pushing her away but ultimately decides that she has Luz here, she might as well take the opportunity. “Yeah, sure, I’d love the help.”

Luz walks up to the sink and just starts cleaning dishes, Eda putting them away as she does. They work in silence for about a minute until Luz asks, “Where is Raine? They’re not doing dishes with you?”

“No, no,” Eda shakes her head, “We’re just- splitting the work.”

“Mmm, yeah, definitely,” Luz unconvincingly hums, “Like you didn’t argue this morning.”

“You heard that?” Eda stops where she’s drying a plate on the counter, turning to look at Luz. Luz looks up at her accusingly.

“Yeah, you weren’t nice to them,” Luz says, placing another plate for Eda to dry and put away next, “Are you planning to fix it?”

Eda turns back to the plate and continues drying, groaning and saying, “Yeah, I mean, I don’t know how but I am absolutely going to try.”

“Do you have a plan?”

“Nope,” Eda pops the P, putting away the plate she finishes drying.

“Well, you should start with apologizing for yelling at them,” Luz tells her, starting on cleaning the silverware in the sink, “You were yelling at them and pressing them, that wasn’t nice.”

"I know, I will, I'll apologize," Eda nods, not even thinking twice about how Luz is scolding her. Luz has done this plenty of times, something about hearing Luz say it makes Eda fold immediately.

"But then I think you need to actually talk about things and not dance around them," Luz asserts, Eda sighing.

"Lily said the same thing," She replies, "It's just, I don't know, scarier than that, kid. It's been over 20 years since we've been together, not to mention I was the one who led to our relationship ending last time."

"But you heard them, they just want to get to know you better. If you're being secretive about what you want and how you feel, they'll never get to know you," Luz reasons, "You gotta be open, Eda, that's like, the most important part of a relationship."

"Yeah, yeah, easier said than done," Eda dismisses her.

"How did this argument come up, anyway? You were fine yesterday."

"We were talking about past partners last night, I had just talked about having a lot of them and Raine said they haven't had any since we dated because they 'don't really want that'," Eda quotes them, "Ridiculous because we've spent months being as close to 'that' as two still-exes can be."

"Eda," Luz stares at her, almost dumbfounded, "If that's how it happened they meant having multiple partners, not being with you!"

Eda thinks about it for a second, going to argue and prove Luz wrong but realizing that's exactly what Raine told her this morning. "Oh," She realizes, and as much as it's at her expense she savors how Luz smiles and laughs at her.

"You're so kidding me right now, you two are such dorks," Luz teases, "Just talk about it! Figure out a timeline that works for the both of you. And I mean the both of you, not just you, Eda."

"Yeah, yeah, not everyone is gonna think like me, I know," Eda chuckles, "I've spent all day thinking they meant they didn't want a relationship, I can't believe that."

"Did Raine not clarify that?"

"They tried to this morning but it ended up coming out as a jumbled mess of an apology, I guess I was just too mad about everything to puzzle it out," Eda replies.

"Well, now you've had the day to clear your head, you can talk to them like a normal person. No yelling and screaming, just be honest," Luz assures her, "Hunter and Willow are quickly overtaking you as my favorite couple other than me and Amity."

"Huh? The two of them are together?" Eda questions, "I thought they weren't."

“Oh, they’re not, but today Willow was asleep on Hunter’s chest so I’m guessing they’re going to be. He did refuse to wrap his arm around her, though, so I think they’re going to fall to the same awkward dance-around-it fate you and Raine are in right now,” Luz tells her, “But I didn’t tell you that.”

“Hey, like you didn’t just swoon over Amity for weeks and proceed to pretend the other one was just a friend,” Eda points out, Luz chuckling. “Speaking of, how have you and bossy boots been? I don’t think I’ve asked you that yet, I’m sorry, I want to hear about it. Did you go on your human date when you were back?”

“Oh, uh, yeah we did. It was good, yeah,” Luz drolls, looking away from Eda, “We’re good.”

Eda immediately panics, really unsure how that was a sensitive topic for Luz. She could press it right now but every time she does that Luz stops talking to her, so Eda decides to keep it light for now. She switches the subject to the first thing she can think of. “You know, Lilith and I had been working on trying to add to your glyph combo list, we made a few of them but neither of us are really that great at doing all of the crazy stuff you can. Maybe at some point we can test them out, without our resident glyph expert we spent forever trying to even get the ones you’ve already written to work.”

Luz smiles, something that makes Eda relax. “Which ones were you trying to get to work?”

“That hover thing, Titan we spent two weeks on it only to figure out we had the glyphs oriented wrong, and then we couldn’t get it to hover to actually stay up for long enough to break the fall,” Eda tells her, “But we made one that is like a little flash bomb thing, a stupid one that turns on and off all of the candles in a room, and one idea for one that makes an everlasting oath. That one we didn’t test more than once, we tested it one time and when Lilith did what she promised she got lit on fire, but that might have been because I drew the fire glyph a little wonky.”

Luz laughs, “Lit on fire?”

“Yeah, well, only a little bit on fire, she’s fine,” Eda assures her, chuckling, “But I think if you wrote that one it would work great, so at some point we’ll have to have you help us out. You’re so impressive, kid, you write those like they’re nothing.”

“They’re really not that hard,” Luz tries to dismiss, but Eda just ruffles her hair.

“Yeah, yeah, you know how talented you are,” Eda counters her, pulling her into a hug that Eda is so happy Luz really reciprocates. She almost grips onto Eda, something that’s definitely surprising, pushing Eda to whisper to her, “I missed you, kid. I missed you a lot.”

“I missed you too,” Luz answers, Eda letting Luz sit in the hug for as long as she wants to. She pulls away right after, though, looking up at Eda almost longingly. Eda looks at her puzzled.

“What’s up, kid? You look bothered by something,” Eda comments, Luz shaking her head.

"No, no, I'm fine. Just- tired, yeah," Luz dismisses her, Eda furrowing her brow at how small Luz's voice sounds.

"Are you sure?" Eda questions, Luz nodding and taking a step back.

"Yeah, yeah," She affirms, "I'm ok, don't worry."

"Alright, I trust you, kiddo. And I trust you to talk to me if you need it, too, I'm always here for you, alright?" Eda reminds her, Luz humming affirmation. Eda wants to hit herself over the head because she doesn't know what to do. Her kid is standing in front of her clearly not ok and Eda can just stand there and stare. It's hitting her, she doesn't know Luz anymore. The fiercely determined, clever, bright Luz she remembers isn't who is standing in front of her. So desperately Eda wants to get to know her again, be able to quell her fears and hear what's been bothering her so much. But Luz won't let it happen, and at every turn, Eda is left dumbfounded by her inability to talk to her own kid, if she gets to even call Luz that anymore.

Luz speaks before Eda can craft a response, telling her, "You don't need to worry about me."

"I'm going to, Luz, of course I'm going to," Eda presses, "I care about you, I'm going to worry about you, end of story."

"Mmm, you have bigger things to worry about," Luz dismisses her, giving her a smile that Eda has seen before. That's Luz's 'I'm about to redirect you to avoid talking about me' smile. "Besides, you can't be worrying about anything until you figure out your thing with Raine, I think the Owl House is going to fall apart with the two of you arguing."

Eda, against her better judgment, pushes back against her redirection, "Hey, don't do that."

"Do what?"

"Turn this back on me, we're talking about you," Eda points at her.

"There's really nothing to talk about, I'm totally fine!" Luz tries to convince her in a brighter tone this time, "Besides, I should probably get back to my room too, I uh, was doing- doing something, with Amity, and I left her hanging."

The words shoot Eda right through the heart. Luz is avoiding her again, just running away when Eda even tries to scratch the surface of what seems to get her down every time they talk. Eda can't fight it, though, Luz is stubborn like that, so she just smiles at her, "Alright, kid, get back to it, then."

"Good luck with Raine," Luz tells her, Eda only getting the opportunity to chuckle before Luz walks out of the room. Eda sighs once she leaves, Owlbert, who was sitting on the counter while they were talking, settling on her shoulder.

"Owlbert, what am I doing wrong?" She frustratingly questions, Owlbert encouragingly hooting and rubbing into her face. Eda reaches up and scratches him on the head, "Guess I can't do anything about it now, right?"

"Luz miss King?" Owlbert suggests.

"Yeah, I'm sure it's some of that, but something tells me it's deeper than just King," Eda replies, looking towards the door and deciding that right now she needs to control what she can, and that's going to be making things better with Raine. She looks over at Owlbert, telling him, "I'm going to talk to Raine, are you coming?"

"Owlbert busy," Owlbert tells her, flying off of her shoulder to fly in front of her, saying "Owlbert wish Eda good luck!"

"Some wingman," Eda rolls her eyes, "But thanks Owlbert," She smiles, "Don't get too disgusting doing whatever secret thing you're doing, buddy."

"Bye!" Owlbert soars out of the room, Eda not letting herself hesitate, going upstairs and right to her door. She puts her hand on the door handle but stops for a second when she remembers how tense Raine looked earlier. She can't go in there blabbing to them until she knows they're ok, and she has just the trick to do it.

So, she opens up the door and walks into the room.

\*\*\*

Raine stares blankly up at the ceiling, continuing to tap the rhythm of the piece they were playing earlier on their collarbone, trying to make themselves zone in on just that beat. It's hard, though, the room seems to be buzzing still, even though they've spent all day on their own speaking to almost no one. Their focus is broken by footsteps down the hallway, heavy footsteps that come right up to the door, making them definitely Eda's. It gives Raine a second to prepare themselves for her coming in and probably arguing with them again. They sit up and look at the door, watching it open and Eda walk in. She quietly shuts the door behind her, smiling at Raine.

"Hey," She greets, very quietly, "Are you doing anything?"

Raine shakes their head, speaking despite how they have to force their voice out, "I don't want to do this right now."

"Hold on, just- here, I got this for you," She reaches into her hair and pulls out a small packet of something, walking over and handing it to Raine. Before she even hands it to them, they can see what it is. It's earplugs, it's their exact brand of earplugs. They take them from her and don't even think to thank her or anything yet, their brain seeing an out to the

overwhelming noise that has been around them all day. They unpack them and immediately put them in their ears, relaxing before the earplugs even do anything. Just the feeling of familiarity brings them comfort, and once they're both in place Raine just sits there for a second, taking in the quiet room. They don't want to smile and give Eda that satisfaction but they can't help it. She got something for them they've been thinking about all day, of course they can't help but smile at her, no matter how mad they are.

"Thanks," They finally say, Eda smiling back and sitting down on the edge of the bed, about as far from them as she can get. When she speaks again, it's quiet and isolated, with no other deafening sounds swirling around her anymore. Just her, letting Raine put their full focus on the words she's saying and not how much she is contributing to the noise in the room.

"So, can we talk?" She asks, Raine nodding and setting aside the packaging on the nightstand. Eda takes a deep breath first before saying, "I'm sorry for yelling at you this morning. I've- I've thought about it and I know I shouldn't be this pushy, I just don't understand what we are and it bothers me."

Raine nods, letting themselves sit on the apology for a second before formulating the words and telling her, "I care about you a lot, I care about you so much and I know it's going to lead somewhere but I don't think now is the time to discover all of that."

"I don't understand," Eda shakes her head, although she keeps her voice level and calm, "I don't understand how you don't know what's going on with us. I get that it's stressful, whatever, but most of the time we're doing nothing, just- why can't we just figure it out now?"

"Because I'm not ready for that," Raine remains firm, "I- It takes me longer to want to be with someone like that than you, Eda. I want to know you first, really know you, not just the surface-level stuff. And I think we're doing fine with that. I feel like I'm learning more about you and how much you've changed all the time, but it's been a long time. You're not the exact same person you were in school, or at twenty years old, and even then I really didn't know you well."

"I don't understand what you mean by 'know me'," Eda answers, Raine thinking about a good way to explain it before detailing it to her.

"A lot of the reason why we worked so well when we were kids is because before we got together we spent every second we could together and I felt like we knew everything about each other. It's- It's not just important for me to know someone before I go into anything with them, it's essential. The reason I've never had any partners after you isn't because I just didn't want it, it's because I never knew anyone well enough to develop any feelings for them, so it's kind of hard to look for someone to date when everyone seems so- so unappealing because I don't know anything about them," They explain, "If- I mean, I do, but if you want to keep going with whatever our relationship is I need to know you first, it's just the way my brain works, I can't explain why but it- it just does. It's not just knowing you, it's the- the- connection I guess? I don't know if that made any sense, I'm trying but my brain is just scrambled today."

"No, no, that made a lot of sense," Eda nods, staring at them for a second and then asking, "But we're- I mean, we're doing a lot of stuff that's very characteristic of, you know, being together, are you uncomfortable with that?"

"No! No, not at all," They shake their head, "I don't mind that at all, I'm not uncomfortable with it, it isn't crossing any lines with me or anything. If it is, of course, I'll let you know, but we're not really doing anything I'm not comfortable with. You, I mean, you get a bit of a pass with some stuff because I did know you, and if things were different maybe it wouldn't take this long but- I'm just comfortable with it, I promise you're not doing anything wrong."

"Ok, ok yeah," Eda nods, smiling, "Thank you for telling me, I- I want to do this for both of us, at a timeline that works for both of us, doing things that work for both of us. Even if I don't know what you're feeling, I respect it anyway and I want to try and take things slower this time because I really want us to work."

Raine nods, "Mhm, I do too, and I appreciate that you're listening. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner than this, I should have because I know that I probably just made you feel like I didn't want anything more than we are right now but that's not true. I'm just- not in a place for it yet."

"And, if I'm honest, I'm probably not either. I've never been one for being careful but right now is definitely not a good time for me," Eda dryly laughs, "I'm down a hand and a kid, definitely not ideal for emotionally investing in someone."

"Mhm, yeah, I get it. Things are crazy but we'll figure it out, right?" They smile at her, "This can take a back burner for now, if you're ok with where we are, so am I, we don't need to rush to change anything."

"Yeah, I like that plan," She affirms, although she doesn't seem to relax at all. Raine furrows their brow at her, contemplating the option of asking her what's wrong before deciding that it's probably good for them to take the leap and ask.

"Is everything ok?" They question, Eda perking up as if she wasn't expecting them to ask.

"Oh, uh, yeah, it's just been a long day," She shrugs, although Raine does not buy it in the slightest. They give her a disapproving stare, Eda rolling her eyes before telling them, "Fine, I just- I talked to Luz while we were washing dishes and it went poorly, that's it."

"Define poorly," Raine requests.

"Like, she was completely fine, clammed up a bit when I mentioned Amity but they're like 15, they could easily just be having relationship problems so I moved on from that. But I gave her a hug and all of a sudden she just got really sad, but when I asked her what was wrong she brushed me off over and over until she just made up an excuse and left," Eda tells them, moving up further onto the bed, her legs crossed as she sits facing Raine, a bit closer but not touching them. "I've been wracking my brain trying to figure out what I did wrong but I don't know, she's just been like this since she got back where she won't talk to me about

anything serious. She clams right up and brushes it off or walks away and- what is wrong with what I'm doing?"

"It isn't inherently you, Eda, Luz has been through a lot. It could be a million other things, you don't know, maybe she's just having a hard time," Raine tells her, "She's got a lot going on around her, she was home for two months and now is back here and is probably having a hard time conceptualizing and adjusting to all of it. Just give her some time."

"But, ugh! That's my kid Raine, how am I supposed to just let her keep- keep getting worse ? She's not eating well, she looks half dead, and she has days where she doesn't even talk to her friends. I- I don't know what it is but it's so familiar ," Eda stresses, Raine patting the spot next to them to indicate for her to come sit closer. She scoots right up to sit beside them, Raine wrapping an arm around her waist and letting her rest her head on their shoulder. She continues talking after she does, shaking her head and speaking in a much quieter, broken tone, "I'm lying, I know exactly what it is. She's just like me, but I don't want her to end up like me. That's my biggest fear with her and how similar we are and I'm watching it happen."

"I don't think turning out like you is bad, I think you mean you don't want her to end up with your mental health," Raine corrects.

"They're the same thing to me," She says, picking her head up and looking at them, "You have to see it, Raine, you have to see her and think of me and the way I was and how that ended up, right?"

Raine wants to say no, assure Eda that Luz won't fall for the same self-pitying isolation that Eda did, but they can't. They see what Eda means, in the way Luz speaks as if everything she's saying is wrong and how she's been avoiding talking about things with anyone until it explodes with anger like at the meeting and how she's been slowly drifting from her friends further and further every so often. Not only that, but they see it in her good days too. On days when Luz is brighter and talking to everyone, it's just like Eda. A grasp at any feelings of sunshine within her that just has the air of desperation, it's all so much like the Eda Raine broke up with. Their silence serves as their answer, Eda sighing.

"Exactly," She looks down into her lap, her hair falling like a curtain around her face. Raine sits there for a second, waiting for her to look back up, but when she doesn't they tuck her hair behind her ear closest to them, Raine surprised to see her eyes glistening with tears, and when she looks up one streams down her cheek, Eda's expression clearly trying to hold back at them.

"Hey, Calamity, it'll be ok," They cup her cheek with their hand, Eda breaking into sobs.

"I'm sorry," She apologizes, Raine drawing her into a hug. Her crying is too loud for them and too close to their ears, but they find that last bit of tolerance within them to put that aside and comfort Eda.

"It's ok, you're allowed to be upset about it. It'll be ok, it won't be like this forever, alright?" They assure her, Eda trying to argue but it only ends up being indecipherable. "Don't worry about it now, you're doing what you can. Luz is going to be just fine, even if she gets worse



you're keeping a very close eye on her and you're doing a great job at it. Camila is watching her too, I'm sure."

"But I'm not fixing it, I'm just letting her slip under and I know what that feels like and it feels horrible and I just- I'm just failing her and abandoning her like what happened to me," She sits back, looking at Raine and wiping her eyes, "I don't know what to do."

"You do whatever you can do," Raine tells her, moving to hold her in her lap with both of their hands, "Just take a deep breath, you're doing everything you can. You love to think that you fail everything you touch and that's just not true, Eda. You're doing everything you can and you care so much, and you know better than anyone that maybe she's not ready to get help yet. When she is, if she comes to you, you need to trust that you know what to say. You don't fail by default, you need to remember that."

She shrugs, Raine repeating themselves.

"You don't fail by default, tell me that," They squeeze her hands, "Repeat it to me or I'm not gonna think you believe me."

"I don't fail by default," She repeats back to them, sniffing and taking her hand away to wipe her eyes again, "I just want her to be alright."

"She will be."

"You don't know that," Eda shakes her head.

"Yes I do," Raine tells her, "I know because she has so many people around her watching out for her, and I know one day she'll understand what she needs better and get that help, if that's with someone else or within her. You can't rush it, let her figure it out as long as she's taking care of herself. She's an independent girl, Eda, give her that benefit of the doubt."

"I want to, I just- I'm so protective over her and I lost her for two months and now she's back and it's like she never knew me in the first place sometimes," Eda runs a hand through her hair, letting out a shaky breath, "Maybe it's just been a long day."

"It has, just let it roll off your back for now, when it comes up, we'll revisit it," Raine smiles at her warmly, "And, if it'll help you feel more in control, you should talk to Camila about it. I know she'll appreciate your perspective on it, and maybe she knows more."

"Mmm, yeah, maybe," Eda shortly replies, Eda moving closer to rest her head back on Raine's shoulder, Raine rubbing her back. Raine can tell she's sick of this topic, so they don't press any further. Raine lets the silence sit for a minute before deciding they feel calm enough and the room is quiet enough to hum to her without Raine's brain exploding. So they do, savoring the light feeling they have for the first time today. They didn't realize how much not having things figured out with Eda was weighing on them, but now that they know she doesn't hate them forever. They get kind of lost in thought, especially now that the world around them is quiet their brain seems to quiet down too. They just hum to her on autopilot, unable to stop themselves from smiling at the woman laying on her shoulder. At how brash

she is, how protective, how caring, how everything she is. Raine, as much as they don't want a relationship right now, can't deny how in love they are with her. Her bringing them the earplugs would've totally made them swoon so hard if they weren't mad at her at the time. She thought of them, and in her flurry of going out and being upset with them, she not only thought of them but also thought about what they would want, and got it for them. Titan, she's so fantastic.

They come back to reality when they realize Eda has been still for a very long time, looking down and leaning forward to see her completely asleep, Raine stopping their humming and chuckling. She really could fall asleep at any moment. Raine decides that it's not worth waking her up, Raine relatively carefully moving her so they're sitting behind her, letting her lean back against them. She stirs a bit, but Raine starts to run their hands through her hair and she settles right down. It's a little difficult with her asleep, but they manage to give her a half decent braid, carding through her hair very slowly and calmly. It's partially for her, relaxing her as she's sleeping, but it's also calming for them. A small, doable, quiet task that helps Eda out. It's a nice way for them to wind down too, so it takes them longer to finish than it should. When they do, though, they lay her down delicately onto the pillow, putting the blanket hanging off the foot of their bed on top of her. They lay down next to her, too, although they don't plan on going to sleep yet. They just lay next to her, Eda immediately taking their arm into her hold, Raine just fascinated at how she doesn't wake up for anything. She'll probably sleep through the night even though it's not even 8 o'clock yet. That's probably indicative of more health problems than Raine wants to think about, but for now they'll appreciate the quiet closeness they get to have and ignore how possibly concerning her sleeping patterns and constant exhaustion are. Eda will forever be an enigma for them.

But she is absolutely their favorite enigma, and they really can't wait for when things finally settle down and they really get to be with her, healthy and happy, the way their relationship always should be.